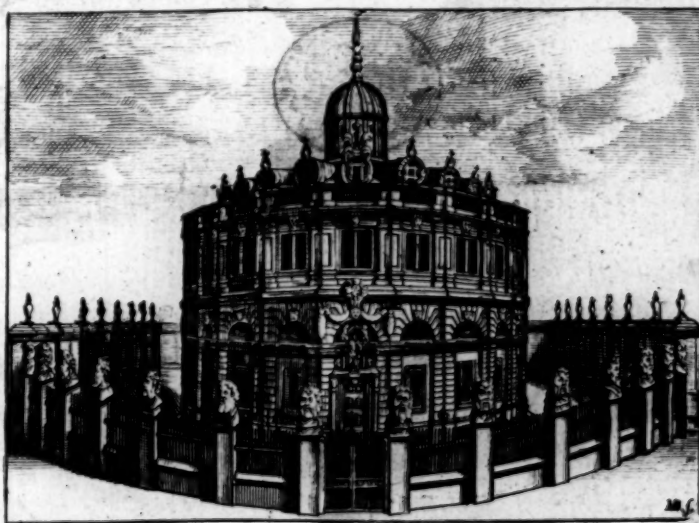


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HISTORY.



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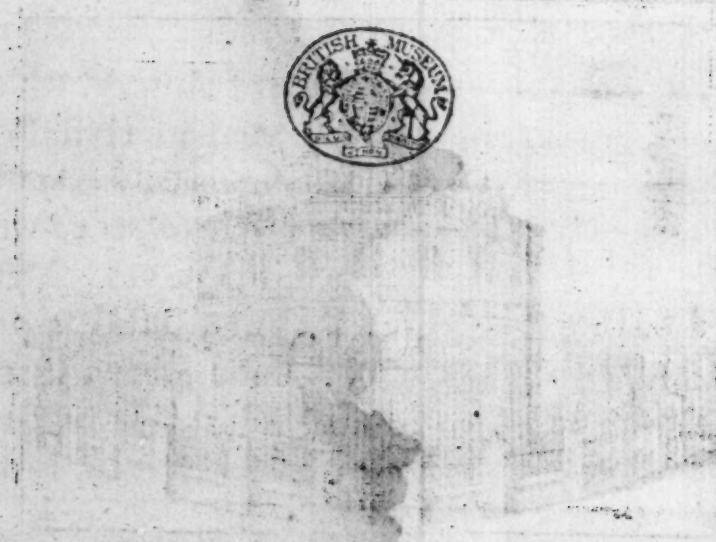
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REFLECTIONS

ON ANCIENT AND MODERN

HISTORY.

THE grand Design of History, which is to instruct Men in civil Prudence, though universally acknowledged, is not often regarded with that Diligence it deserves. Many Readers are content, if they can satisfy a present, indolent, Curiosity: some labour in the Discovery of insignificant Modes and Customs: while others direct their whole Attention to the Greatness and Variety of Facts.

To explore the Counsels, unfold the Measures, and remark the Consequences, that belong to every important Action; to distinguish

between Prudence and Temerity, Design and Chance; this is, to render the Knowledge of past Events useful to the present Age.

This Knowledge discloses to us the wisest and most successful Arts, by which civil Discipline may be established, and Kingdoms maintained or extended: this teaches us to conduct Armies, secure Conquests, invent necessary Laws, restrain the intemperate Rule of Princes, and acquire Power and Happiness.

But it may very reasonably be doubted whether the Histories of ancient Times are so conducive to these Purposes, as we are generally apt to think. It is certain, the first Ages of the World, though they may supply matter of Wonder and Curiosity, can never be fit Patterns for our Imitation. The Plainness and Simplicity of the early Inhabitants of the Earth, their wandering and laborious Life, their Ignorance of Ambition, and Contempt of Luxury and Riches, can find no Place among the false Improvements of later Times.

There is no need to say more of this easy and innocent way of Life, both because it is so different from the present Constitution of human Manners, and because itself did not continue

tinue long in the World, being swallowed up by Degrees in those Refinements, which the great Increase, as well as natural Depravity of Mankind, seem in some Measure to have rendered necessary. Let us turn our Eyes then to the first political Societies, when the Patriarchal Government ceased, and several Families by Consent, as is probable, were united under one Chief. It is easy to conceive, that some of those little Kings, who were at first Governours of single Cities, soon enlarged their Territories, and formed a little State. Desire of Power, and Jealousy of the neighbouring People, would afterwards be the Occasion of fresh Contention. New Acquisitions were made: and these, being still increased under a Succession of brave and fortunate Monarchs, after a Course of many Years composed the great Empires of the World. With Regard to the Civil Institutions of these first Communities, History affords us not the least Knowledge of them. However, it is probable that their chiefs were chosen without Intrigue or Partiality; that the conquered States were treated with Mildness, and generally permitted to become fellow-citizens with the Conquerors; and lastly, that their Laws

were few and plain, and such as always met with an exact, and ready, Obedience.

We are as little acquainted with the Condition of the greater Kingdoms, which fall next under our Observation; those of the ancient Syrians and Phenicians. Among the many copious Accounts, that have been transmitted to us, of their religious Ceremonies, we find not the least Description of their Laws or Policy.

Egypt indeed has found better Fortune. Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus have preserved to us a large Body of her Laws, than which Nothing perhaps, in their Kind, was ever conceived with greater Wisdom. Which is the more to be wondered at, because this Nation is said to be the first that invented Rules of Government, for the Restraint of Society, and to make a People happy. But besides that We want a more circumstantial, and credible, History of this ancient Kingdom, these very Laws may be sufficient to convince Us, that they had made but an inconsiderable Progress in the Science of Politics: since they all manifestly tend only to establish present Quiet; and this too, on the Supposition that no new Circumstances, no Changes or Disorders, would ever happen in the

the State: They make no Provision against the Exigencies of Government; nor were they in the least contrived either to advance Conquests, or repel Invasions: which wants no other Evidence, than that this People was so easily subdued by the Kings of Babylon and Persia.

If the Envy of the Grecians, and the Injuries of Time, had not deprived us of almost all the Records that related to the great Assyrian Empire, it is probable, many Things would have been found worthy our Attention, in so long a Course of Years, and such a Series of astonishing Victories: in which Time, many inconceivable Changes and Revolutions must of Necessity have happened. But all we now know, or can conjecture, is; that this extensive Kingdom deviated by Degrees from it's original Simplicity and Liberty; the Power of the Prince still enlarging itself with his Dominions, 'till at length his Will became the sole and unalterable Rule of Government.

We come now to a Period, from which one might expect better Satisfaction; the Reign of Cyrus: a Prince, whose Conquests would justly fill us with Admiration, if his civil Administration were not more wonderful. To restrain so
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vast and unwieldy a Body, made up of so many different, and distant, Nations; to compose all these to so absolute a Submission, that we read only of the Revolt of one single Country, during his whole Government, though his Death was followed with the immediate Defection of Cities, and even whole Provinces, from the Persian Empire; to forego the Arts of Cruelty and Oppression, the most effectual Support of despotic Power, and enforce Obedience by Clemency; this surely must be the Result of the deepest Policy and Wisdom. But by what particular Regulations all this was accomplished, is a Secret to us; the Accounts of this Monarch scarce mentioning any of his Civil Constitutions, if we except only what is recorded of the Persian Discipline and Manners. But certainly this boasted Discipline alone, their great Temperance and Exercise, their Love of Justice and Observance of their Word, though they might facilitate the Conquest of a barbarous People, could contribute but little to make their Subjection lasting.

Greece will always be remembered with some Degree of Veneration, as the great Mistress of Taste and Science, the Nurse of Poets, Orators, and Philosophers. But we shall be much deceived,

ceived, if we expect to find the same Superiority of Genius in their Models of civil Government. Among all the little States, the Kingdom of Lacedemon was doubtless the best established; being able to support itself, with very little Interruption, for more than eight hundred Years. The chief of the Institutions, which so long preserved this People, were, to observe an Equality in the Division of Wealth, to practise a most severe and constant Discipline, to exclude all Strangers from their Community; and, above all things, to maintain an impartial Distribution of Power between the King, Senate, and People, so that each part of the State might be dependent, and every one a Check, upon the rest: the want of which Care was one of the principal Causes of the many Revolutions at Athens, and of the hasty Ruin of that Republic. Now in a Government framed like this of Sparta one great Defect is very obvious. A People thus constituted may for a Time be secure within themselves; and this perhaps was all that was intended by Lycurgus, who, in Reality, was a better Philosopher, than Statesman: but they must either always continue in the same Condition, which seems
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next to impossible; or expose themselves to inevitable Ruin by invading the neighbouring States. Almost every Branch of such a Constitution is inconsistent with any Increase of Power. And in fact we find, that when the Spartans began to look for Conquests abroad, the Attempt soon turned to their Destruction; though for a Time they had reduced almost all Greece to their Obedience.

The Commonwealth of Rome, which is next to be considered, will demand a more distinct and ample View. When we compare the original Meanness of this famous Empire with it's Grandeur afterwards, and observe it's gradual Increase as it were from the smallest Speck to an incredible Magnitude; when we see a People twice driven to the Brink of Ruin, recover Vigour in their very Fall, and rise stronger from their Defeat; in short, when we survey the astonishing Series of fortunate Events, the Croud of Victories, that conspired to raise them to the most exalted Height of Pride and Power; we are at first inclined to think, that all this must have been the Effect of a Plan, formed with Skill from the Beginning, and conducted in it's Progress by the best Measures that Penetration,

tration, Foresight, and human Prudence could suggest. In Consequence of this false Notion, the Inventions of modern Policy have been miserably tortured, to explain the Actions and Successes of the first Romans: and this savage, and illiterate, People, a Troop of Herdsmen, and obscure Adventurers, in the very Infancy of their Society are found to be acquainted with the most refined, and subtle, Arts of Government.

But it will be no difficult Matter to resolve the whole Transactions of this Nation, during the first five hundred Years at least, into a few very simple and obvious Principles. The first of these was a determined Resolution to extend their Territories. The Conquest of their Neighbours, as it was necessary for their Security, so was it likewise a Work perfectly well suited to that Roughness of Temper, which their former savage Way of Life had taught them, and which Romulus carefully cherished. This Disposition, which was still strengthened by Success, became by Degrees so stubbornly rooted in them, that the Indolence of two of their Kings was not able to shake it. When they returned to Action, it was with the same Vigour, and Afflu-

rance, as before; as if they had foreseen, that they were to be one day Masters of the World. To this if we join their personal Fortitude, and Contempt of Death, together with their Love of Glory, which was every Day heightened by the Pride of new Victories; we cannot be surpris'd, if with such Arms they out-braved all Danger, and surmounted every Obstacle, 'till they had completed the Conquest of Italy.

During this whole Period, of which we are speaking, the Romans had made but very inconsiderable Advances in military Skill. Their Wars were, for the most Part, of short Continuance. They often entered the Field, attacked their Enemies, and returned Home victorious, in the Space of ten, or twenty, Days. It was in the School of Pyrrhus, and afterwards of Hannibal, that they were taught the Methods of supporting long Campaigns, in foreign Countries, against a brave, and well-disciplined, Enemy. Here they were perfected in the Arts of conducting a Siege, of choosing Ground for the Engagement, and ranging their Forces in regular Order; 'till, at length, by constant Exercise, and unwearied Application, they were become more skilful than their Masters. But
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certainly this People, however possessed of all those Qualities, that could serve to advance their Power and Conquests, will not be found to afford so perfect a Model for the civil Government of Kingdoms, as is often fondly pretended. Born, as it were, in the midst of Arms, they were both averse to, and incapable of, every Kind of Discipline, but that of War. What does the whole History of the Republic present us with, besides Disorder, and Anarchy? The wise Establishments of some of their Kings were soon neglected and forgotten, and occasional, tumultuary, Laws took Place, which were as soon repealed, as made. Instead of Harmony and Agreement among the several Bodies of the State, we meet with Violence, Dissension, and Tumult. Instead of a firm, and permanent, Government, we find one loose, and feeble; disjointed, and disfigured, by constant Faction; and subject to continual Changes. Historians speak extravagantly of the Roman Virtues; their Love of Justice, their Disinterestedness, and Contempt of Riches: yet it is notorious, that a Spirit of Ambition, Avarice, and Selfishness, prevailed amongst the Nobles, even in the earliest Ages of the Common-

wealth: * so that it is not much to be wondered at, if, in the Progress of Years, publick Rapine, Violence, and Cruelty, Disorders, and Licentiousness of every Kind, were practised with Impunity; 'till Rome became as famous by her Debaucheries and Crimes, as by her Victories. It cannot however be denied, that, even in the most corrupted Times, there were not wanting some few bright Examples of Temperance, and true Patriotism; who will receive from latest Posterity the Praises due to their uncommon Virtue; and will be respected as Ornaments of human Nature, while they are the Reproach of their Age and Country.

The Roman Constitution is highly magnified by some Writers, as being neither a Monarchy, nor an Aristocracy, nor yet a Popular Government; but such a Mixture of all these, as united the Advantages, and avoided the Dangers, and

* These Vices, joined to their repeated Breach of Faith, were the Causes of the first great Sedition that happened in Rome. The People retired from the City; and the Senate, to appease them, foolishly consented to the Creation of Tribunes: that is, they gave an incurable wound to their own Authority and Independency; and, in effect, changed the Constitution. These Officers, it is well known, proved the Occasion of perpetual Diffensions; and, which deserves to be remarked, became at last the Instruments of subverting that very Liberty, which they had been appointed to defend.

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Inconveniencies, of each. Such an Establishment is, by the universal Consent of wise Men, acknowledged to be the best that human Prudence can invent. Mutual Dependence, and a reciprocal Strength of Credit, and Authority, between the several Orders of a State, are the firmest Bonds of Government. But this [was not the case at Rome. The three Bodies of that Republic had indeed each a distinct Share of the sovereign Power: but the Distribution was too unequal; and the Balance so much inclined to the People's Side, that we find the joint Weight of the Consuls, and Senate, was not able to counterpoise it. * The Authority of the Consuls, if we except the time when they were in the Field, where their Power was absolute, extended but little further than to regulate the Time, and Forms, and collect the Suffrages, of publick Assemblies. To the Senate was committed the Care of the Treasury, and of all the Farms, and Revenues, of the Commonwealth. They had the Charge of receiving, and sending Embassies; of causing War, or Peace, to be declared; and of giving Judgment in the

* See Polybius.

Appeals of foreign Kings and States. The remaining Branches of the Administration belonged wholly to the People. They were the sole Guardians, and Dispensers, of Rewards, and Punishments, without Appeal: nor were Citizens of the highest Rank exempt from their Tribunal. All Places of Dignity, and Profit, were conferred by them alone. They made, or abrogated, all Laws: deliberated of War, and Peace: confirmed, or revoked, Treaties: and, as often as they disliked the Conduct of the Senate, put a full Stop to the Proceedings of that Body, by the Opposition of a single Tribune. How little is wanting to make such a Government a perfect Democracy?

This Inequality of Power proved the Source of everlasting Discord. The People, finding themselves in Possession of much the greatest Share of Government, believed they had Strength enough to extort the rest; while the Senate as obstinately resolved not to yield the least Part of their Authority, which they saw was already too contracted. One can hardly read, without Horror, of the frequent dismal Effects of these Commotions: and yet this is often accounted a fortunate Circumstance in the Roman Constitution.

tion. Certain it is, that no Man in his Senfes would defire to live in a State fo miserably diftracted with intestine Wars. Nor is it, I think, fo very evident, that thefe continual Struggles were in any Manner the Prefervation of Liberty, though, beyond all Doubt, they contributed much to it's Deftruction. Carthage, which was likewise a Republic, was neither difturbed by any popular Sedition, nor ever oppreffed by the Ambition, or Tyranny, of the Nobles, during the Space of above five hundred Years. So exact was the Balance of their reciprocal Authority. But afterwards, when the People grew insolent, and would no longer depend upon the Senate, all was Tumult, and Faction; 'till having by Violence affumed more Power, than they had a Right to, or were able to manage, they became one of the principal Caufes of the Ruin of that famous Kingdom.

From this fhort Review it fhould feem reasonable to conclude, that we ought not to expect any great Advantage from the Study of Ancient History. For as the Accounts of many Nations are either totally loft, or fo much obfcured by innumerable Defects and Interruptions, that, when we would form a Judgment of

of their Transactions, Discipline, or Manners, we lose ourselves in Uncertainty and Confusion; so, on the other Hand, the Knowledge of those Countries, which have preserved as it were a perfect Series of History, can only serve to teach us, that there is not the least Resemblance or Conformity between their Arts of Life and Government, and our own. In fact, Policy, and Mysteries of State, are the Invention of later Ages. For however copious some Authors may have been in explaining what they call the refined and subtle Artifices of Augustus, and in unravelling the intricate Secrets of his Government; I am mistaken, if the whole Conduct of that Prince was not directed by a few very general, and easy, Maxims. Such were, his restoring the ancient Forms, and Usages, of the Commonwealth; and binding the People to his Interests, by becoming their more immediate Patron, while at the same time he left some Shadow of Authority to the Senate. He made no Attempt to enlarge the Bounds of the Empire; by which Means he avoided the Danger that might arise from cherishing the old warlike Disposition of the Romans: and as he was very sensible, that all illegal Power must
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be supported either by great Severity, or unexpected Clemency; as Occasion demanded, he made use of both. For as, in the Beginning of his Government, he removed by Proscription those whom he knew to be irreconcilable Enemies to Tyranny; so, in all the Conspiracies that were discovered after his Establishment, he not only pardoned the Persons engaged in them, but even advanced them to Posts of Honour and Profit; wisely judging, that, though Liberty had been pretended, yet in Reality Ambition was the sole Motive of their Discontent. By the Help of such Cautions as these it is no Wonder that Augustus was always secure both in his Person, and Government; especially if we remember that such was then the State of Rome, that it was not in the Power even of the Emperor himself to restore the People to their former Freedom.

But what shall be said of Tiberius, and his Successors, who, instead of following the plain Maxims of Augustus, seem to have studied the deepest Mysteries of the Cabinet; employing every Invention of Fraud and Policy, to elude the Laws, and complete the Slavery of their Country? Here is often the Appearance indeed

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of Craft, Artifice, and Diffimulation: but are we not too apt, in this Case, to mistake Temper for Policy, and the mere Effects of Cruelty or Caprice for Reasons of State? Is it credible, that Men who were either subject to the Will of a Favourite, or to the more arbitrary Dominion of their infamous Pleasures and Debaucheries; who were never awakened from their Insensibility and Indolence, unless by some sudden Call of Passion; is it credible that such Men should act by any certain System; not to say, with the most refined Dexterity and Address? Artifice and Ingenuity, as they are useless Instruments in the Hands of unlimited Power, so are they inconsistent with the hasty and violent Transports of Cruelty and Repentment, with which these Tyrants were agitated. Nor will it avail, to urge the Authority of Tacitus in Opposition to this Opinion; since it is well known how much has been objected to his History, upon this very Account, by the common Judgment of learned Men: That he converts all Actions into Policy, and discovers a Mystery in every Thing; that the most simple, natural, and necessary, Incidents are by him represented to be the Effects of Intrigue, and Artifice; that,

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where the true Principles are unknown, he is not satisfied barely to assign imaginary ones, unless they are at the same time the most subtle, delicate, and obscure, that Invention can produce; and in short, that he every where characterizes Himself, and his own Genius, and not the Persons whose Actions he describes.

There is yet a further Proof, that the best Source of civil Instruction must be searched for in Examples not altogether so remote from our own Times. The grand Business of the Roman Policy was only to contain their own Dominions in Order and Obedience: on the contrary, the Interests of Modern Communities depend entirely on their Management of many neighbouring States, equal perhaps in Power to themselves. It is not now sufficient to invent wise Regulations, by which the Honour of the Prince, and Liberty of the Subject, may be secured at Home. Foreign Treaties, and Negotiations, are become more dangerous than open War. So that the most expert Statesman is He, who can defeat the Prudence, and elude the Artifices, of other Princes, and make them unwittingly the Instruments of advancing his own Designs. From this, and many other Circumstances, in which

the present Polity of Kingdoms is so opposite to that of former Ages, it seems evident enough, that it would be unsafe, in Civil Affairs, to propose Antiquity for a Guide: since no Actions of Importance can succeed, if they are not, in every Respect, suited not only to the Condition and Customs of Government, but also to the Genius, Humours, and Inclinations, of the People*.

If the foregoing Reflections are well founded, it can never be enough lamented, that the Moderns have as yet arrived at so little Perfection in the Art of writing History. What Variance and Contradiction do we meet with, not only in Authors of distant Times, and different Nations, but in those of the same Age, and Country†? Add to this, such Crudity of Com-

* Instances might be multiplied as well from ancient, as modern, History, to support this Observation. But the Truth of it cannot appear more conspicuously, than in the Conduct of Sylla and Julius Cæsar: who, in pursuing the same Design, scarce agreed in any one common Measure, each of them making Use of such Arts as, after the nicest Attention, they found to be most agreeable to the present Temper, and Circumstances of Rome. To this Wisdom they owed their Success; as, for Want of such Caution, the like Attempt had some Years before proved fatal to Manlius, and some other ambitious Men.

† This is the more extraordinary, because the Moderns have all the Opportunities of getting Information, that they can desire; from public Records, Registers, Memorials of Ambassadors &c. an Advantage, which the
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position, such Meanness of Style, and gross Mistakes in Judgment, that, were we not ourselves interested in the Facts they relate, it would scarce be possible for a Man of Sense or Taste ever to be conversant with Pieces of so little Merit. The Truth is, the Importance and Difficulty of the Historian's Office is so little understood, or considered, by us, that we often suffer it to be usurped by Persons of contemptible Abilities, and who have never lived within the Sphere of public Business. Whereas the Ancients, who laboured in this Kind of Writing, besides their Advantages of Genius, and the Improvements of Education, were acquainted with Men, as well as Things, and often employed in the greatest Affairs of Government. Hence is that Solidity, with which they judge of Actions; and that nice Discernment of the several Lines and Features (if I may so speak) of human Nature, which are so strongly expressed in all the Characters, throughout their Histories. It is not enough, that such a Person is brave, another temperate, or ambitious, unless we are in-

the Ancients knew and felt the Want of, when they were deceived by false Relations, and forced to adopt for Truth every absurd Story, that was countenanced by Tradition.

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structed what particular Kind of Ambition, Temperance, or Bravery, is meant. They saw, how various and even opposite Qualities were often disposed by Nature into one Character; and how frequently was found a Mixture both of Good and Ill in the same Quality. But with modern Writers every Thing is either Vice or Virtue. Their Heroes are drawn with the most exact Resemblance; and distinguished only by their Merits, or Defects. They have but one Kind of Courage, Justice, and Wisdom; the same Cowardice, Ambition, or Prodigality.

If a perfect History should ever appear, it must be the Work, not of a Man, whose Studies and Experience have been confined within a narrow Circle of Life, or to the Labours of any single Profession; but of one, who, like the Ancients, has acquired a thorough Knowledge of Mankind, by passing through the several Stages of public business, and being alike conversant in the Secrets of Religion, War, and Politics. We are not without some few Authors of this Character*. But they describe the Transactions of a few Years only; and have, besides,

* See de Retz's Memoirs; which alone contain a more extensive System of Politics, than all the Books of Machiavel.

too generally neglected the Art of Writing: using, for the most Part, a Style of Business, which falls much below the Grandeur, and Dignity, of History. This however is more tolerable than the common-place Maxims, wrong Criticism, and perverse Jumble of ancient and modern Politics, which are so frequent in the Men of mere Learning; or than the Impertinences of those groveling Writers, who, on Pretence of explaining every hidden Spring and Movement of the State, paint the great Personages of History after their own vile Likeness, and make them speak, and act, as they themselves would have done in the same Circumstances.

I shall only add a Word or two, by Way of Conclusion, concerning the gross Partiality, of which modern Historians stand accused. Indeed it can hardly be imagined, that the Ancients themselves were intirely free from this Fault. They seem, in many Instances, to have entertained much too magnificent an Idea of the Worth and Dignity of their own Nation: from whence it is probable they have heightened the Report of some Actions; as they have, doubtless, concealed others, which would have reflected

cted Dishonour upon their Country. This Artifice, however criminal, at least proceeded from an honest Cause. But in later Times, private Interests, and Animosities, have perverted the Truth of History; and Patriotism gives place to Faction. It is well known, that the British Constitution in particular has given Rise to such Divisions, as will probably continue to the Dissolution of the Government. For when Speculative Notions are once called in to support the Pretensions of either Side, every Man is as it were constrained to take Party. The Effects of this, in the Subject before us, are obvious. If we examine the best Histories of this Country, we shall find that they have all received a Tincture from the Principles of their Authors*.

* The Reader will easily inform himself what Persons are here understood to be the best Authors of English History: only I think it necessary, on many accounts, that we except BISHOP BURNET from that number. His personal Resentment put Him upon writing History. He relates the Actions of a Persecutor, and Benefactor: and it is easy to believe, that a Man in such Circumstances must violate the Laws of Truth. The Remembrance of his Injuries is always present, and gives Venom to his Pen. Let us add to this, that intemperate and malicious Curiosity, which penetrates into the most private Recesses of Vice. The greatest of his Triumphs is to draw the Veil of secret Infamy, and expose to View Transactions that were before concealed from the World; though they serve not in the least either to embellish the Style, or connect the Series, of his History; and will never obtain more Credit than perhaps to suspend the Judgment of the Reader, since they are supported only by one single, suspected, Testimony.

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This occasions a most extraordinary Ferment in the Nation: while the Partizans of both Sides contend with mutual Violence for the Honour of those Writers, who most incline to their own Opinions. The Passion is caught by Contagion. Reason and Judgment are neglected; and Approbation, or Censure, is formed by Prejudice. We may conclude, that if ever an English Writer should arise, who has the Courage equally to displease the Zealots of both Parties, such a one will bid fairest for that Character of Truth, which constitutes the Soul of History.

F I N I S.